

AWESOME

Media Strategies

For Park & Recreation Professionals

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CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS
don't miss them.

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I. Different forms of Public Relations

- A. **Advertising** – buying time and space for your message. This is a controlled method. Your dollar, your message.
- B. **Lobbying** – Influencing legislative and regulatory decisions. This is uncontrolled and competitive, but perhaps necessary.
- C. **Public Affairs / Public Information / Communications** – This includes everything from press and media to community groups. It is uncontrolled, at the mercy of the media or group.
- D. **Issues Management** – This is the process of identifying an issue and taking proactive action to insure your story is told strongly.
- E. **Press Agency** – Hollywood. Make me famous.
- F. **Investor Relations** – Keeping the stockholders happy and the money flowing.
- G. **Development** – Developing relationships that can provide funds for your organization, i.e., hospitals, zoos, disease groups, schools.

II. Is there such a thing as an awesome, sure-fire strategy for media attention?

- A. The answer is Yes and No.
- B. No -- The reporter writing the story, the newspaper writing the editorial, have final say over what appears in their media outlet.
- C. Yes -- Because there are methods and tactics you can employ and practice on a regular basis that will dramatically improve your odds for gaining positive media attention.

Strategy #1 -- Be proactive. What all reporters want, is a good story.

- A. Get to know your media and your reporters.
- B. Reporters work to gain sources and contacts.
- C. You do the same, by developing reporter contacts.
- D. Keep a media binder.
 - (1) Get name, media outlet, phone number, email address of every reporter you talk to ... every one of them.
 - (2) Make a note about that reporter. Subject and reason for their call, beat they normally cover, etc.
 - (3) Develop a profile of reporters and media outlets.
 - (4) This identifies the friendlies from the enemies.
 - (5) Work to supply the friendlies with stories they are looking for.
 - (6) You are now developing relationships.
 - (7) You are now defining yourself as a good source to them.
 - (8) You are now developing trust and credibility.
 - (9) You now have places where you can turn to increase your chances of getting attention.
 - (10) You have developed a listing for "Feeding the Beast."
- E. By doing the above, you are establishing the position you want.
 - (1) You are supplying a regular inventory of positive stories.
 - (2) You are developing a relationship.
 - (3) You become a person the particular reporter knows, trusts and perhaps even likes....a trusted source.
 - (4) You are not an unknown flak, PIO or PR person who has no standing, no credibility and no trust.

F. In bad times, you are in a better position to get fair treatment.

- (1) The reporter calls with the bad news, potentially negative story.
- (2) That reporter knows who to call first, you, and that's what you want.
- (3) That reporter has chatted with you on many subjects.
- (4) You have developed a rapport with that reporter
- (5) Therefore, that reporter is more inclined to come at you in a more fair method with questions.
- (6) That reporter is more inclined to insure that you are treated fairly in the story.

III. Strategy # 2 -- Never miss an opportunity.

- A. Watch for story opportunities.(Examples)
- B. Have your own agency or company members give you tips.
- C. Develop sources and contacts within your own organization.
- D. Know the folks in our own organization who do well with media interviews and get them out there when appropriate.
- E. The success here is that your own people like the press attention for the good things they are going.
- F. Present the idea not just as a string of facts or statistics, but as a story.
 - (1) Find a hook for the story.
 - (2) Offer something enticing.
 - (3) Find the compelling characters, which give good interviews with good quotes.
 - (4) Offer "exclusivity". A reporter loves to know that he/she "owns" the story.
 - (5) Create a happy reporter and you gain an ally.

- G. Never, ever send news releases just for the sake of quantity. If you send lots of stuff they don't like, you will condition them to toss your releases routinely without a second glance.

IV. Strategy #3 -- Be reactive without fail.

- A. When a reporter calls, return that call ASAP.

- (1) Understand the pressure reporters are under to get the story.
- (2) Understand the deadline they are ordered to meet.
- (3) Understand that without your side of the story, so far, the reporter thinks you are a lamb headed for slaughter.
- (4) Be accessible. When bad news is at your doorstep, this is when you should be the most accessible.
- (5) Work to educate press with difficult issues. Don't automatically expect understanding of complicated issues.

- B. Waiting or any delay might rule you out of the story.

- C. Being out of the story means your side of the story is out of the story...dead and irrelevant.

- D. When the reporter calls, you don't need to give an answer that second.

- E. You can say you need to gather information.

- F. You can buy time. Get the deadline for the story.

- G. Talk to people. Get your side of the story organized.

- H. Get back to the reporter with hard facts and meet the deadline. Seek an answer that might steal the headline. A bold answer.

- I. If you feel your agency is getting a raw deal, and your agency is right, do not hesitate to react strongly to make sure the reporter gets the message that the other side could be very wrong.
 - In his book SPIN, Michael Sitrick says: "Do something predictable and the press will yawn. Do something silly to get their attention, and they'll mock you mercilessly. Do something unexpected and meaningful, and you'll make the front page."

- J. To set the record straight, make a bold stroke.
- K. If you know negative news is coming, consider a preemptive strike.
 - (1) The side that speaks first often sets the tone and pace, and frames the debate, for following stories.
 - (2) Shape the argument, and you will shape the headlines.
 - (3) The first story becomes a reference point.
 - (4) Think strategically.
 - (a) Immediate damage control is part of the strategy.
 - (b) However, look beyond, what is the end-state you want.
 - (c) If your agency blundered, that cannot be undone, get beyond it and frame the story for the future, the plan to fix it.
- L. Reshape the argument and you will reshape the headline.
- M. Never ever lie!!! Get your truth, your facts out there in the true context of the story. If things are juxtaposed to make it look like your agency is at fault, and you're not, get to work straightening it out.
- N. If you don't tell your story, someone else will, perhaps not to your liking.
- O. If you say "No comment", you are roadkill.
- P. The media hates a vacuum. If you don't respond, refuse comment, that's not the end of it, they'll find someone who will talk, perhaps not to your liking.
- Q. If you are silent, you will be seen as admitting guilt.
- R. Never let a mistake or errors go unchallenged. Doing so locks those mistakes and errors into the historical archives.

V. Strategy #4 -- Write your own stories.

- A. Every park system and agency has positive programs and events.
- B. At State Parks, we search for the stories.
- C. One of my PIO's is constantly communicating with the field in a never-ending search.
- D. He writes 8 to 10 features every year, mixed in with his many other responsibilities.

- E. He writes them in feature story form.
- F. He gets quotes from the people involved.
- G. He sends them to the medium to smaller papers throughout the state, sometimes shotgunned everywhere, sometimes sent to a specific market.
- H. The amazing thing --- Nearly all of them get printed "as is" ... the entire story.
- I. Some papers call for pictures, we send them.
- J. Here's some examples:
- K. Op-ed, letters or special stories.
 - (1) For op-ed, see the opportunity for a first strike, and write something for your Director.
 - (2) For letters, respond to op-ed articles that need a response.
 - (3) For special stories -- Many newspapers will accept a major article, such as: "This special report on preservation of wetland resources of the State of California submitted to the XYZ media from Ruth Coleman, Director of State Parks.

VI. Strategy #5 -- Have a web page and use it to your advantage.

- A. Put up a Press Room section on your web
- B. Add every press release.
- C. Put fact sheets in place.
- D. Create a home for story ideas.
- E. Make sure reporters know its there and can use it.

VII. Strategy #6 -- Use email in place of faxes.

- A. More and more reporters prefer an email.
- B. Send releases by email.
- C. For good story ideas, send an email with facts.
- D. Follow with phone call.

VIII. Strategy #7 -- Train your staff.

- A. Teach them to do all of the above.
- B. Know your audience.
 - (1) In PR, you must understand the wants and needs of the general public.
 - (2) As a staff member dealing with the press, you must understand the wants and needs of reporters, editors, producers and assignment editors.
 - (3) If you know how reporters think and work, you will know what you can do to meet the need and get positive attention.
 - (4) Study the media's approach to issues.

IX. Strategy #8 -- The Bottom-Line!

- A. Effective PR is all about relationships.
- B. Effective PR is all about credibility.
- C. Effective PR is all about trust.
- D. Effective PR is all about telling your story and being understood.